THE the 1786 Cambridge

ASCENSION:

A

POETICAL ESSAY.

By THOMAS HUGHES, M.A.

OF ST. JOHN's COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

CAMBRIDGE,

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M. DCC. LXXX.

CAMBRIDGE

A Clauſe of Mr. SEATON's Will, Dated *Oct.* 8. 1738.

I Give my Kiſlingbury Eſtate to the Univerſity of Cambridge for ever: the Rents of which ſhall be diſpoſed of yearly by the Vice-Chancellor for the time being, as he the Vice-Chancellor, the Maſter of Clare-Hall, and the Greek Profeſſor for the time being, or any two of them ſhall agree. Which three perſons aforeſaid ſhall give out a Subject, which Subject ſhall for the firſt year be one or other of the Perfections or Attributes of the Supreme Being, and ſo the ſucceeding Years, till the Subject is exhauſted; and afterwards the Subject ſhall be either Death, Judgment, Heaven, Hell, Purity of Heart, &c. or whatever elſe may be judged by the Vice-Chancellor, Maſter of Clare-Hall, and Greek Profeſſor, to be moſt conducive to the honour of the Supreme Being and recommendation of Virtue. And they ſhall yearly diſpoſe of the Rent of the above Eſtate to that Maſter of Arts, whoſe Poem on the Subject given ſhall be beſt approved by them. Which Poem I ordain to be always in Engliſh, and to be printed; the expence of which ſhall be deducted out of the product of the Eſtate, and the reſidue given as a reward for the Compoſer of the Poem, or Ode, or Copy of Verſes.

WE the underwritten, do aſſign Mr. SEATON's Reward for the Year 1780, to THOMAS HUGHES, M.A. for his Poem on *The Aſcenſion*; and do direct the ſaid Poem to be printed according to the Tenor of the Will.

L. Yates, Vice-Chancellor.
P. S. Goddard, Maſter of Clare-Hall.
W. Cooke, Greek Profeſſor.

THE ASCENSION.

HAIL, holy Spirit of God! Of bounteous Heaven
Beſt gift to man, that erſt, in viſion clad
Nocturnal or diurnal, didſt convey
Things yet myſterious, and to Amos' ſon
Unfold the future birth of Iſrael's King.
What time the godhead, not, as now, remote,
And gather'd from his works, but face to face,
Immediate preſence, or through kindred voice
Prophetic, held high converſe with mankind.
Gift now denied: though haply now, as then
(Were but the ſongſter fitted to the ſize
And value of the ſong) my argument
Might claim thy aid: ſo ſhould celeſtial theme,
Celeſtial ſong demand, and notes inſpir'd.

Long had the ancient foe of God and man,
From Tartarus eſcap'd, thro' Earth's wide bounds
Maintain'd his untam'd empire; ſo high Heaven
Permitted; that mankind, the ſad effects
Of ſin experienc'd, might their ſins deplore,
Deploring ſue for grace, and grace obtain.
Wide was the diſmal route, and horrible
The devaſtation, which th' accurſed fiend
Around him ſcatter'd, as with ſin and death
Encircled, and their beſtial train, he march'd
Through earth, and at each lengthen'd halt ſet up
Grim idols, trophy ſure of victory gain'd.
Nor deem'd he this ſufficient: but the fruits
Of victory to ſecure, around him ſpread
The ſhades of thickeſt night, in which the ſeeds
Of ignorance and mental ſlavery
Were ſow'd profuſe, fit harveſt to fit ſoil.
His march began from Eden: to the plains
Of Babel next he onward held his way;
Whence through a thouſand inroads, north and ſouth,

Line 23. — *As with ſin and death*, &c.] Vide Milton's Par. Loſt. b. 2. l. 1024.

Diverging,

Diverging, eaſt and weſt, his troops diſpers'd
Coeval empire hold: — and ſtill had held,
Had not the promis'd Son of Man, foretold
Of woman's ſeed to bruiſe the ſerpent's head,
Aris'n at length, and in Judea's land
Firſt ſtemm'd the mighty torrent of their rage.

Great is the myſtery of God, and great
The treaſures of his wiſdom; to mankind
Known only by their glad effects: ſo ſpake
The holy convert Paul. — And juſtly ſpake:
For how ſhall human intellect explain
That conflict which the Son of Man (ere yet
His native Heaven receiv'd him) ſore maintain'd
Againſt his foe. Shall he, who to his aid
Sufficient might have rous'd the hoſt of Heaven,
Singly ſupport the fight? with loſs of life
Support? God gave the word "The Son of Man
Muſt die." He heard; he bow'd his head, and died.
Three days he lay in death: the third beheld
His reſurrection: forty more, on earth

Line 41. — *Great is the myſtery*, &c.] Epiſt. to the Coloſſ. ii. 2, 3.

(Myſterious number!) to his choſen few,
Amidſt the faithleſs faithful found, and call'd
On weighty errand, converſe meet, as beſt
Befitted, and glad preſence he vouchſaf'd.
For well he knew his Father's will, and ſcope
Of Prophecy, whether in words reveal'd
Or ſacred type prefigur'd, that on high
He ſoon muſt reaſcend. Much then remain'd
Of conſolation, much of counſel, much
Of ſacred knowledge; from their faithful guide
Soon ſep'rate, to prepare them for the work
Of miniſtry, and fit their purged ſight
To views beyond the ken of mortal eye,
To ſchemes immenſe of things, that in their graſp
Held worlds ſuſpended, and proclaim'd aloud
Glad tidings of ſalvation to mankind.

Due to it's promis'd birth, the myſtic morn,
Long look'd for, came; when to the ſacred mount
Conducted by their faithful Leader, march'd

Line 56. — Vide Milton's Par. Loſt. b. 5. l. 896.

So ſpake the Seraph Abdiel faithful found,
Among the faithleſs faithful only he.

The

The apoſtolic few: ſlow was their ſtep,
And ſilent, oft as with imploring eye
And conſcious of eventful work, they mark'd
His lonely pace; for on deep thought he ſeem'd
Intent, and purpoſe high of things unknown
Save only to himſelf: him had the Spirit
Inform'd, the Comforter of after days.
Not that regardleſs of the paſſing hour,
An hour ſo big, time hurried on his way
With careleſs wing, and held his known career.
Stop'd in mid ether, as they roll'd along
The year's eternal circle, God's command
The willing ſpheres obey'd: nor they alone
Obey'd; but through creation's vital pulſe
Darts, quick as lightning's wing, an high arreſt.
Ceſſation meet of leſſer labours, meet
To grace th' aſcending triumph of a God.

Line 81. — The liberty, here taken, will appear the more excuſeable when it is known, that in *Wales*, and ſome other remoter parts of the Kingdom, there are popular ſuperſtitions, which ſeem to favour it. The vulgar in theſe countries will tell you, that birds in particular, are ſeldom ſeen to feed or build their neſts on Holy-Thurſday.

Then

Then firſt old Ocean through his inmoſt depths
Knew peace, eternal toil that heretofore
Knew only, and tempeſtuous toſſings high
With wild uproar: even the brute nature felt
The word, and droop'd the head, or flagg'd the wing.
Meanwhile the thrones of Heaven expectance mute
And mix'd impatience held, while to their hymns
Eternal, of eternal Godhead's praiſe,
The Angels firſt gave pauſe, and glad ſuſpenſe.
Man only walk'd inconſcious; ſo had God
Ordain'd, and him alone unworthy deem'd
(His hands yet ſtain'd with ſlaughter) to behold
Heaven's viſions, or his favour'd counſels ſhare.

Myſterious Godhead! to thy ſov'reign will
And ways unſearchable, let humble man
Bow with ſubmiſſion chearful: nor indulge
Vain ſpeculation, why a partial few,
Nor they of great account, but peaſant ſouls
Unletter'd, ſhould be left ſole witneſſes
Of Chriſt's Aſcenſion: to man's prejudice
Meet ſcandal this, in paſt and preſent day.

Line 94. — *Hell ſcarce holds the wild uproar.*] Milton's Par. Loſt. b. 2. l. 541.

Why

Why not with trumpet's blaſt, or ought of ſound
Terrific, as in Iſrael once was heard
From Sinai's pregnant ſummit, gather round
Th' expecting nations, there with ſolemn pomp
Inveſted, cloath'd with majeſty and pow'r
Receive th' acknowledg'd heir of Heaven and earth.
So ſhould not to the doubtful ſpecious cauſe
Be left of doubt, nor to the faithleſs faith
Be wanting: ſo ſhould faith, confirm'd by ſenſe,
Unſhaken ſtand, and in good works abound. ——
——Man thus would reaſon: by thy wiſer plans
Confuted; not the wiſdom of this world.
Enough, that to the willing ſtill remains
Juſt ground of faith, and from recorded writ
To minds unbiaſs'd evidence mature.
That evidence explore: thoſe ſacred truths
Of Chriſt's teſtators, who with guided ſtep
Had meaſur'd now the plain, whoſe middle ſpace
Lies 'twixt Jeruſalem and Kidron's brook:
Kidron, the hallow'd ſtream that licks the foot
Of Gethſemane; whoſe oft-explor'd retreats,
Fraught with the mem'ry of paſt ſorrows, ſtole

With

With ſoft intruſion on the loftier flights
Of Chriſt's diſtended thought: for to the left
Was ſeen the garden, where his midnight prayer
Had oft aſpir'd to Heaven. He ſtopt, he look'd,
And gave to frailty, from the weightier cares
Of Heaven, a tear. So ſome expiring Saint
(If mortal to immortal ought will bear
Of bleſt ſimilitude) with upturn'd eye
Intent on Heaven, might nathleſs ſhed a tear
In memory of his earthly pilgrimage:
While, wrapt in viſionary bliſs, the ſoul
Expatiates free, and o'er the frailer part
Triumphant, wings her conqueſt to the ſkies.
Such thought our Saviour knew. Nor he alone
Remember'd, what to Peter's mind would oft
Recur: how with upbraiding's gentleſt voice
His ſlumbers had been broken. Oft he view'd
The well-known ſpot, with half-averted eye
As fearing to be ſeen: as oft he bluſh'd
With ſhame of paſt offence: for in his ear
The voice ſtill ſounded, "Could'ſt thou not one hour,

Line 150. — See map of old *Jeruſalem* according to *Villalpandus*.

Unkind

Unkind aſſociate, watch? the ſpirit indeed
Is willing, but, alas! the fleſh is weak."
Thus they on Kidron's hallow'd ſtream. O! ſtream
For ever bleſs'd, that in thy ſhadowy vale
With gentleſt murmur glideſt; witneſs oft
To Judah's outrage, from the earlier day
When David with his frighted followers croſs'd
Thy paſſage, bearing in their ſacred hands
The wand'ring ark, to when his promis'd ſon,
In humiliation haply by that flight
Prefigur'd, to thy neighb'ring garden ſtole,
And pour'd to Heaven his anguiſh'd ſoul in prayer.
Oh, tell (for thou canſt tell) the conflict ſore
He there with Hell's dread pow'rs ſuſtain'd: how oft
He wept th' eſtate of man, his own how oft,
Condemn'd to ſuffer for their ſins th' extreme
Of bittereſt death; while from his opening pores
Iſſued the bloody ſweat, and all the man
Stood in the horrors of his mind confeſs'd.
Nor deem the act unworthy, captious man,
That of his nature mixt, the frailer half,
By ſuff'rance of the mightier, once prevail'd:

The manhood o'er the godhead. Monſter thou
Of baſe ingratitude, to cavil thus
With impious ſlander, and deride the hour
For thee and for thy ſins with ſhame endur'd.
Boaſt, infidel (if boaſt thou muſt) that Chriſt,
The Son of God, wept womaniſh tears: but yet
Remember, that his tears extinguiſh'd not
His faith, or reſignation meek —— To thee
O! Abba, Father (ſo he pray'd) all things
Are poſſible: paſs from me then this cup ——
Yet not my will, but thine, O! God, be done.

Far other ſpirit, and far happier day
Aſſum'd it's empire now. The hour approach'd,
" When to the Heaven of Heavens he ſhould aſcend
" With victory triumphing through the air
" Over his foes." Of which his ſoul forewarn'd
(Such virtue there reſided) heavenly thoughts
Alone revolv'd; which in ſucceſſion quick
His way beguiling, on the ſacred mount
Of Olivet behold him.

Here pauſe we. So our general anceſtor

Line 190. — *When to the Heaven*, &c.] Vide Milton's Par. Loſt. b. 12. l. 451.

Adam,

Adam, of men firſt born, paus'd heretofore,
In wonder loſt, as to his purged ſight
Th' archangel Michael, therefore ſent of Heaven,
What of his future race was giv'n to know
Unfolded; chiefly, what him moſt concern'd,
The great Redeemer's form pourtrayed; his life,
His ignominious death, and, from the grave
Emancipate, his reaſcent to Heaven. —
Our general father paus'd — and ſilence ſhort
Permitting, thus his joy and wonder ſpake.
" O! goodneſs infinite, goodneſs immenſe!
" That all this good of evil ſhall produce,
" And evil turn to good; more wonderful
" Than that which by creation firſt brought forth
" Light out of darkneſs: full of doubt I ſtand,
" Whether I ſhould repent me now of ſin
" By me done and occaſion'd, or rejoice
" Much more, that much more good thereof ſhall
" ſpring."
Thus he. —— And oh! that with united voice
Of grateful praiſe, we his predeſtin'd heirs,

Line 208. — *O goodneſs infinite*, &c.] Milton's Par. Loſt. b. 12. l. 469.

The heirs of covenanted grace, would breathe
Like tribute; oft as to our mind recurs,
To him foreshadow'd only, but to us
Confirm'd in past event, the blissful theme.
Wide was the varied prospect, and to thought
Much moving, which it's bosom fair display'd
In lenghten'd landscape to the sacred brow
Of Olivet, that o'er th' extensive whole
Mid-rising, look'd unclouded majesty.
In front, and to the eastern sun oppos'd,
Which o'er the burnish'd pile with tremulous ray
Play'd wanton, rose the temple's awful form,
Vain work of human pride; which he too thought,
So late expell'd, as from the sacred mount
He look'd, and smil'd serene. Meanwhile in smoke
Involv'd (fit emblem of their darken'd minds)
Hatching vain counsels, and with conscious pride
O'er their past works of mischief brooding, sat
It's carnal worshippers; fit instruments
Of evil to themselves, as soon they felt.
From Sion's tow'rs wide spread on either side

Line 222. — See the map referred to in p. 8.

The

The fading landſcape loſt itſelf in air;
Save where a mound, with goodlieſt ſhape of ſtone
Sepulchral, ſhew'd Iſaiah with the dead:
Iſaiah, hallow'd name, by ages paſt
Rever'd, and preſent; harbinger of morn
Prophetic, that on Iſrael early dawn'd.
Whoſe ſons, ſollicitous of future reign
By him foretold, with grateful hand had rais'd
This monumental pride. Ah! better far
Had been their work, and of their prophet more
Accepted, if their faith and pious works
Themſelves a living monument had ſhewn
Of mem'ry to his name, then honour'd beſt,
When honour'd in the prince by him proclaim'd.
Proclaim'd in vain; for they to carnal ſenſe
Devote, would nought but carnal things receive.
No wonder; if the few, of Chriſt prepar'd
To purer thought, and chos'n his followers,
Yet with unwilling hand remov'd the veil
Of prejudice obſcure: nor had as yet
Remov'd at all; for faithful to the text
That preſag'd great Meſſiah's empire, this

Their firſt and lateſt care they thus propos'd
In full aſſembly on the ſacred mount. ——
—— Lord, wilt thou at this time reſtore again
The kingdom to thy Iſrael? —— 'Tis not meet
For you, replied their Lord, to know the times
And ſeaſons, which almighty Wiſdom knows,
And pow'r maintains: enough, that on your ſouls
The ſpirit of God ſhall dart with inward ray,
And heavenly light in fulleſt ſtreams be pour'd.
Then ſhall ye to remoteſt people, Jew
Or Gentile, bear my name, and through the world
Proclaim forgiveneſs of repented ſins.
He ſpake: nor ever word ſpake more. For now
Behold a wonder! from the yielding earth,
That felt unuſual weight, he ſudden roſe
Upborn, and ſteer'd a flight of gentleſt wing
His native Heaven to gain; whilſt from their eye,
That to it's center fixt in mute ſurvey

Line 263. — Acts i. 6, 7 and 8.

Line 275. — Milton's Par. Loſt. b. 1. l. 226.

——— *incumbent on the duſky air*
That felt unuſual weight.

Purſu'd

Purſu'd th' aſcending glory, a bright cloud,
Of bidd'n acceſs, his lateſt preſence caught:
By angel forms ſupported, who in ſong
Not unperceiv'd, and choral ſymphony
Through Heaven's wide empyrean loud rejoic'd.